

Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League

Founded in 1984 and serving Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama and Maryland
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Have Fun, Build Your Group and Raise Money!

You can have fun during your meetings and events AND you can build your group AND you can raise money, all at the same time!

So, you might ask the question: Besides raising money, WHY should our group fundraise and WHEN should we fundraise?

Well, the answer is: **Local groups should never quit grassroots fundraising.** It has so many benefits: community support, visibility and opportunities for outreach. It keeps your members involved and committed, and shows outside funders that you have a real and active base in the community.

Start out by inviting your Insiders to give. Every organization has insiders; for example, staff, board members, advisory council, volunteers, people who rely on your good work, founders, and former board members. These people are already committed to your cause. You'll need volunteers to solicit them to encourage thoughtful, larger gifts. People talking directly to people gets the best results.

Encourage your insiders to come up with their own ways of raising money. A creative approach will open other people's minds to ways they could help. I'll give some examples soon.

It's important not to get caught up in never-ending research when you could be working on group building action events that actually help resolve issues. **Stop researching and start taking action!** Make friend-raising and fund-raising your goal.

Look for local leaders who are decision makers. Look for group allies like the PTA, nurses, doctors, riverkeepers. Ask for their support.

So, how do you involve people once they join your cause? How long do you wait to

communicate with them once they have joined in?

Try to meet monthly. At your community meetings, give out awards of appreciation and recognition to build your social network. Invite guest speakers. Have a panel discussion. Debate key issues. Invite other victorious groups to visit and share their strategy and promote good networking. Make it interesting and entertaining. Always have a donation jar in a very visible location. Mention how much you appreciate donations of any size.

Invite your members to take action by conducting a door knocking campaign and ask folks to volunteer to do something....sign a petition, hand out a flyer or participate in a survey. And why not ask new contacts for a donation during these projects?

Have a BBQ or a potluck dinner. Hold a bake sale or car wash and hand out campaign leaflets while you're doing it.

Hold viewings of environmental movies. Have your people at exits handing out postcards that express your views and how to donate. Or hold viewings right in your home with a donation jar on the table.

Hold an environmental poster contest for young people in your community. Make it a media event and feature the posters at the library or at the mall. Then meet at the library or mall to discuss photos and fact sheets and to view your environmental posters on display.

Have a 'human faces story survey' that respects personal stories and members. Get their story on how they have been impacted. Take their picture, attach it to their story and feature it on a poster. All this leads up to a donation request for your cause.

Here's a simple fundraising idea: 50-50 raffle. For instance, everyone donates at least \$1 per ticket and 50% goes to the organization and 50% goes to the person who draws the winning raffle ticket. Quick and easy! And this reminds folks that you need donations! Maybe most will donate only \$1, but some may give \$10 or \$20 or more. It's fun to see how quick the money grows and who wins the raffle. Put a flower arrangement on your tables and raffle them off so the winner takes them home at the end of the meeting.

Build your membership through the Internet with Facebook and Twitter. Send out one page newsletters to your contacts and always include easy instructions to make donations to your cause.

Remember that fundraising benefits generate publicity for your organization while they raise money for you. Consider dinner-dances, benefit concerts, cruises, and major sporting events. Think about events for bargain hunters and gamblers (bingos, raffles, casino nights, garage sales, rummage sales, auctions, flea markets, and bake sales), and educational events (ranging from major speakers that fill large auditoriums to slide shows shown in community centers). One of our groups had Ralph Nader speak at a local university and he not only discussed their local campaign, he publicly donated a large gift and asked the audience to do the same. University students were told they would get extra credit for attending the presentation, so the audience was lively with questions from young bright minds. It was a big success.

Sometimes these special events raise a small amount of net proceeds but they require a large amount of time and energy, so we must remember that they do have other values. They include:

- "Friend" raising - invite potential donors: even if the event doesn't generate a large

amount of funds, if successful, it will have generated a large amount of friends for your organization and its staff.

- Increased public visibility for the campaign: think of special events fundraising as marketing your organization to the community, donors and potential donors.
- Volunteer involvement: special events require a large amount of time and organization; assemble a strong team of volunteers to help get the job done.
- Leadership training and development.
- Public education regarding the campaign and its mission.
- Recognize companies in the event program that donate goods or services gifts to be auctioned or used. This brings increased visibility to these companies as well.
- Always invite media to the event and generate as much publicity as possible.
- Partner with for-profit companies to sponsor the event to save fundraising costs.

Have you tried any of these fund raising Ideas?

- Collect product donations and hold an online or in person silent auction.
- Get volunteers to donate homemade meals to sell.
- Everyone likes Karaoke – Have participants raise pledges for their commitment to lip-sync and sell tickets to the performance.
- Coordinate group members to wash cars in a high traffic location for donations.
- Solicit local celebrities to enter their best dishes and have people pay to vote on the winners.
- Coordinate with a store to offer gift wrap services during the holidays.
- Get baked goods donated to sell at a large event like a dance or basketball game.
- Yard Sale
- Door to Door Canvassing
- Ads in Program Books / Newsletters/church bulletins
- Telephone solicitation

- Walkathon or Race
- House Party
- Spaghetti dinners
- Pinto Bean Supper
- Turkey Shoot
- Direct Mailing

One of our BREDL groups held a Clean Water Car Wash and very young children and older students washed cars. The theme was clean water with the focus on the New River. Another theme was a Clean Air Festival held by Mountain People Incorporated. They were concerned about a diesel electric generating plant. A local car dealer sponsored the event because they were concerned about the damage to paint on their dealership cars from toxins. This group made \$12,000 on the raffle of the car donated by the car dealer. Another group made \$3000 when they held a spaghetti dinner at a local winery. One group working on a mega-dump was asking the county to adopt a local resolution. They had a fundraising day and sold baked goods, and got matching business donations which multiplied the money quickly. **We found that user friendly terminology like Poor Man's Supper or Pinto Bean Supper will get folks to volunteer.** This idea alone got 15 people to sign up for a cooking committee and they raised \$3000. You can keep it simple and still have fun with it.

You may want to look beyond tried-and-true grassroots fundraising. Most of us know that dirty industries are putting pressure on national funders, just as they put pressure on the EPA and Congress to get a more business friendly political environment and on research institutions to get results that meet their needs. So, communities organizing for environmental justice should be looking closer to home for funding.

Local and regional funders aren't hard to find. Many libraries have collections of fundraising reference books in cooperation with The Foundation Center, whose website includes a list of cooperating libraries, an on-line database of contact information for foundations, links to hundreds of grantmaker websites and several commonly used grant application forms for users to download. Also listed in the Resources section are publications that can help if you can't get to one of the cooperating libraries.

Communication is key. Local organizers and leaders need to talk to other groups, trading information and leads. They should also talk to funders, including those that funded them in the past. Don't hesitate to ask for suggestions and advice. Connect with the other positive forces in your community. Build relationships that bring you funding and identify new allies - and that isolate and undermine your community's enemies.

Before speaking to any potential funder, get your homework done. Their first impression of you should be that you are well informed and have done some research before approaching them. There are key things to find out from funder web sites and directories:

1. Do they fund the type of work your organization does?
2. Do they fund groups in your geographic area?
3. What is the amount of a typical grant from this funder?
4. What are the funder's application and deadline requirements?

Set a budget, make a plan and get started as soon as possible. Many sources are only able to give with advance notice and during a specific time of the year.

With so many sources to ask for money, there's no reason not to be asking as many sources as

possible. Ask friends, family, businesses, organizations, governments, schools, employers.

Let potential donors know how you know them, and what this request means to you. Let them know their contribution is an investment in you, and the great cause you're working to support.

Track everything you do. Track: who you want to contact, how much you want to raise from them, how you've contacted them, what they're response was, and if they've given. Know how much and be sure that you've thanked them too.

People need to know how much to give, not just that you're requesting help – so make sure you share what your overall goal is with everyone you know. For everyone you contact, know roughly how much you might expect them to give, and give them a range of fixed donation options. Donor's contribution options might be \$10, \$25, \$50, \$100.

Following up is the key to raising more than half of the money you raise. Sometimes you'll need to follow up three times or more before you get a response. Mother Teresa would ask for a donation and if refused, she would bow her head and pray. Then ask again and again until she received something. Never give up!

Remember to send a thank you note, so you leave the door open to ask again.

When requesting donations, make sure you give the option to be listed as "Anonymous" on any public listings of your donors, since some donors want to give anonymously.

During your fundraising efforts, give people the option to opt-in to updates. After you've reached your goal, let people know. After you've spent the funds you raised, send an update to let people know how you made a difference, and how that was all possible because of their support.

Remember that mobile access gives fundraisers real-time access to their fundraising progress. They can log-in any time to see how many donations have been collected and how close they are to reaching their goal. They can post updates on Facebook or Twitter using sharing widgets to keep their fundraising campaign up front with family and friends.

Integrating mobile giving as part of your campaign shows everyone that your nonprofit organization is tech savvy and responding to current trends.

I hope some of these ideas are helpful. Thank you for your consideration and for remembering BREDL when you are ready to make a donation to earth stewardship, environmental democracy, social justice and community empowerment.■



Contact Beverly Kerr to arrange a training workshop for your group. Many topics available.

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Beverly Kerr is the Associate Director of The Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League, a regional, community-based, non-profit organization with the principles of earth stewardship, environmental democracy, social justice, and community empowerment. This grassroots organization has been working in rural and disadvantaged areas across the Southeast for nearly 30 years. BREDL helps each community group solve pressing local problems by developing a citizens' campaign with goals, strategies, activities, and assessments. How can BREDL help you and your community?